



## ***‘Free, safe legal’ and accessible - removing barriers to reproductive rights***

Women have the right to control their own bodies, including their fertility, and to pursue all reproductive choices. This is a fundamental principle of gender equality.

Barriers to reproductive rights for women are also barriers to full social, economic and political life including workplace equality. It is a woman's human right to have autonomy over her own body.

Northern Ireland's very restrictive abortion legislation do not eradicate women's need for abortions as evidenced by recent abortion statistics from the UK which show that 724 gave NI addresses

### **An affront to compassion and civil liberty**

Forcing women to travel abroad to access this service, which for most other European women is available in their own country, is an abdication of the responsibility for the health and safety of local women. The reality confronted by women seeking to access an abortion, of having to raise the necessary funds, to face denunciation and abuse as they attempt to seek advice, to travel to Britain and other European countries at a difficult time in their lives, and to be portrayed as “murderers” and “criminals” is an affront to concepts of compassion and civil liberty.

Abortion is a class issue. Repressive abortion legislation discriminates disproportionately against working class women on low incomes and girls from less well-off families. While women can travel abroad to obtain an abortion this is not an option for many women, including migrant women, women on low incomes, women who are single parents and young girls whose families simply cannot afford the cost.

While women from Northern Ireland no longer have to pay for an abortion in Britain the substantial travel and accommodation costs adversely affects many lower-income working class families ability to obtain an abortion. Women with children may also face extra childcare costs at this time.

## **Free, safe legal and accessible**

Difficulties in raising money results in women and girls from Northern Ireland having later abortions than their UK sisters and thus facing a more complicated procedure. It is grossly unfair that the UK 67 Abortion Act, which provides for a free, safe, legal and accessible abortion service for women in their own country, does not extend to Northern Ireland which is part of the same jurisdiction.

The Workers' Party opposes the paternalistic attitude that regards women as second class citizens incapable of making their own decisions and strongly condemns those who engage in anti-choice harassment and abuse. One cannot claim to support and fight for a rights based society if one denies bodily autonomy to over 50 percent of the population.

We believe in a woman's right to choose and recognise that women who are pregnant should have all appropriate options available to them. Women should neither be compelled to terminate a pregnancy in circumstances where the woman has no wish to do so, nor should a pregnant woman be compelled to continue with a pregnancy where it is her choice to terminate the pregnancy.

## **Appropriate treatment**

Women who opt to continue with a pregnancy in the event of the tragic circumstances of fatal foetal abnormality should be afforded all the appropriate treatment and care to enable them to so do.

There should be sufficient care, secular counselling and support for women who wish to continue to full term. For women who wish to terminate their pregnancy the Workers' Party supports the provision of free, safe and accessible abortion in her own country which will include practical facilities to support women seeking an abortion and quality post-abortion care. We seek immediate legislation to ensure free, safe and accessible abortion in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

The Workers' Party demands

- That every woman should have complete autonomy over her own body
- That abortion, including the abortion pill, should be decriminalised.
- That woman in both Northern Ireland and the Republic should have equal and complete access to the highest attainable standards of reproductive health, including abortion.

- The introduction of the 67 Abortion Act to NI, in an amended form which will remove any claims of criminality and will provide for free, safe, legal and accessible abortions within NI.
- The provision of practical facilities to support women seeking an abortion and quality post-abortion care.
- Free access to contraception as well as proper health and social care for pregnant women.
- The provision of responsible, secular, medically accurate sex education and confidential access to comprehensive contraceptive services, including the provision of school and education based services must be readily available to reduce unwanted pregnancies.